BEYOND THE DESERT

ALFRED NOYES

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BEYOND THE DESERT

A TALE OF DEATH VALLEY

BY

ALFRED NOYES

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BEYOND THE DESERT

CHAPTER I

THERE is only one "Painted Desert," and it belongs to Arizona; but all the desert region of Western America, from Mexico to Death Valley, deserves the hint of beauty in that name. It is perilous to go astray in that region. The wanderer who loses his landmarks may never find them again. There is an exquisite delicacy in the ever changing shadows of those lightly undulating leagues, colored like the pelt of a gigantic sleeping leopard, in which the spots are formed by the grotesque olive green cacti, and the lighter parts of the fur are soft drifting sand. But the picture dissolves before you have grasped it. The distant mesas, those rocky table-lands, faceted like jewels, darken and smoulder with every change of the sky.

The lilac facet turns to amethyst, the amethyst to violet, the violet to lilac again; and, with every change of color, the landmarks alter. Forms change, as if the hard dry landscape were the softest of cloud-stuff. It is dangerous to go astray in a land where the cavern of shadow quietly turns to a delicate blue pyramid, cut and polished like a jewel by the hand of Nature herself, or where the broken gray rocks against a blue sky-line become an enchanted garden of orange and vermilion in the middle of a gray plain.

The horseman, or even the pedestrian, on the outskirts of that desert, may be tempted to explore those rifts and canyons, apparently not more than three miles away, colored like the mouth of Aladdin's cave. The colors are too warm to suggest the deadly embraces of the Sphinx. Not until the traveler has watched the hills of his desire receding before him hour after hour, through that dry clear air, and tries to retrace his path, does it dawn upon him that a living Sphinx, with purple-

lidded eyes and Indian blood in her veins, may be more perilous than any shaped in Egypt. Weeks afterwards, a search party may find the bleached bones of her victim, and the prints in the sand will indicate that he has been walking in a circle, perhaps round the carcass of his horse, till he dropped exhausted.

It was with a vivid sense of this peril that, as dawn broke over the American desert, on September 1, 19—, a gaunt disheveled man who had been resting at the foot of a giant cactus, rose to his feet and turned, staring at the ring of the horizon all round him as a sailor looks for the first glimpse of land. His own black shadow, stretching endlessly to the west, through the goblin shadows of the cactus, was the only sign of life that he could see in all that tawny waste. Eastward, the dawn had dappled the ledges of the blue mesas with a red that seemed to smoke like spilt blood in the beginnings of the heat haze. The color was repeated in a blood-stained strip of cotton that bandaged the man's left arm, and in an-

other discarded strip on the ground at his feet.

In his white drill trousers and cotton shirt, open across the chest where he had ripped away the strips for the bandage, James Baxter cut a very strange figure against that lonely background. His lean face, under its dark mane of hair, was that of an educated man, but a man born for rebellion; one of those flaming creatures who shy at hard facts, as an untamed mustang will shy at a wheelbarrow. Like most of his kind, he had Celtic blood in him, and his dark eyes were equally quick to blaze with anger, or soften to beauty and tenderness. He could talk of killing, the wiping out of tyrants, or the devastation of cities in one moment, and in the next, a spirit as innocent as that of a child or any other wild creature would smile at you. In short, he had never found himself; and it is hardly speaking too symbolically to say that this was really why he had now lost himself in the desert.

How far he had wandered during the night Baxter did not know. A little before sunset

on the previous evening, when the train, in which he was being conveyed as a prisoner, had been held up in the desert by a freight-wreck ahead, his warders had allowed him to stretch his legs with the rest of the passengers. They had taken it for granted that the surrounding desert eliminated all hope of escape, even for an I. W. W. leader. Baxter had seized a favorable moment, dived under the train, and sprinted through the cactus. He was in far better training than his pursuers—it was only ten years since he had carried away the long-distance honors at a California college, and he had always kept himself fit. He had been pursued hotly, not only by his warders but by a number of passengers, yelping in the excitement of the chase. He even thought that he saw, once, as he looked back, a figure on a horse. It was possible, for he remembered seeing a horse put into the train at a wayside station. He had watched its owner—a lanky Western girl—feeding it with sugar. But there must have been a delay

before any one thought of a mounted pursuit. It was far away behind him, and the quick-falling night soon blotted it out altogether. A series of broken rocks helped him to get away completely, with nothing worse than the slight bullet wound in his forearm which he had received in the first minute of his flight.

His one idea, all through the night, had been to plunge as far as possible into the sheltering heart of the desert; to put mile after mile of its starlit mystery between himself and his pursuers; and, here at dawn, he was lost as hopelessly as a man who should cut himself adrift from an ocean liner, half way across the Atlantic, in an open boat.

He had not been entirely without foresight in preparing for his escape. Passengers on the trans-continental trains are often as heavily loaded with gifts of provender as those on an Atlantic liner, and, before he dived under the train, Baxter had carefully noted and seized a basket belonging to a plump Episcopal clergyman. On the other side of

the train, many of the passengers were preparing to open bottles of drinking water. He had grabbed two of these and thrust them into the basket as he ran.

He found on examining the clergyman's property this morning, that it included a Camembert cheese, six large Bartlett pears, a box of crackers, three slabs of milk chocolate, a bunch of Cornichon grapes, and part of a Los Angeles Sunday newspaper.

He had lost his bearings completely during the night. It was not till daybreak that he knew east from west again. The fever of his flight would have prevented him from "steering by the stars," even if he had known enough about it—and he did not. It is a far more difficult feat in practice than in theory. There was only one course to take now, and that was to try to strike the railroad again. If he could find it, he might follow it after dark, westward. Here and there, he knew, there were little wayside settlements of Mexican workmen, amongst whom he might count on finding sympathizers

with his particular branch of crime. He might even be able to steal a ride on a freight-train and get into California. Certainly, this was his chief hope.

CHAPTER II

It was not until he was actually on his feet, with the intention of carrying out this plan, that he was faced by another difficulty, of a maddening simplicity. He had got the points of the compass now, and he knew that the railway ran roughly from east to west. But he did not know whether the line lay to the north or south of him. He tried to remember on which side of the train he had been taken out by his warders; and whether the engine had been to his left or to his right as he escaped. His dive under the train confused his memory, in just those essential particulars, and the more he puzzled over them the more uncertain he became. He tried to remember whether the sun had been to his left or to his right; but most of the time, before sunset, he had been thinking of too many other things, provender, bullets, and the pursuit. He had

run due east as soon as he sighted the broken rocks through which he had eventually made his escape. There was nothing for it but to try to retrace his footsteps,—a difficult matter, since he had walked at random for hours, now on sand and now on ledges of rock; but he might be able to discover the general direction. The thought of failure was too grim to admit.

The direction of the footprints in the sand was plain enough, for a time, as he retraced them due north. Then he found that he was bearing to the east, until the long shadow that had been traveling at his left side was now flung straight behind him. In a few more minutes he was bearing south with his shadow stretching away to the right; and, in yet another half hour, he was following his own black image on the sand due west. Then, with the sweat breaking out upon him, he stopped dead under a giant cactus; for he saw a double series of footprints ahead of him; he had come back to the starting point again.

His wanderings last night must have been ended by a complete circle. There was the slight hollow in the sand where he had rested under the cactus, and the blood-stained bandage that he had discarded.

Of course, he had missed some point where the footprints broke off in another direction, probably over rocky ground, where they had left no trace. He set off again, more quickly now, following the double trail of four footprints, but glancing to left and right like a hawk. He could see no sign of any departure from the track. Inexorably it swung him round to the east, and his black shadow, shortening as the sun mounted, swung behind him again. Inexorably it turned him to the south, and the shadow ambled beside him. Then, westward again, leaning forward and trying to overtake that dwindling mockery of himself, he hurried on till the giant cactus halted him once more, and he saw a three-fold trail of six footprints leading to the northeast, beyond the blood-stained strip of cotton.

It affected him queerly, with that sensation of having passed through it all before in some previous existence, the sensation which scientists tell us is no more mysterious in its origin than Jim Baxter's circular trail. Perhaps it was the slight shock of the sensation that distracted him at precisely the most important point of his round, as a conjurer distracts the attention of his audience at the critical moment. Behind the cactus there was a stretch of firm ground that took no impression of footprints. On the other side of this, fifty yards away, if he had explored it, Baxter would have come upon another trail of footprints leading due south; for the railway lay to the south of him. The simple fact that the divergence from the circle occurred at his starting point, prevented him from looking for it on his return. He sat down with his back to the cactus and tried to think out his best course.

He drew a picture of the train in the desert dust, indicating the points of the compass, and

vainly trying to stimulate his memory by the process. But he could remember only absolutely unimportant things, the indignant face of the clergyman, the startled group from whom he had snatched the water-bottles, the face of the lanky Western girl who had fed her horse with sugar.

He had not even the slightest instinctive preference now with regard to the direction he should choose. He tried to think it out, with a view to possible failure on his first attempt. At the outside, the railway could not be more than forty miles to the north or south of him, probably not nearly so much, allowing for all his detours. If he struck for the south at his first attempt, he ought to cover that distance in twelve hours. Then, if there were no sign of the railway, it would be certain that it lay to the north of him, probably not more than eighty miles distant. This would mean, allowing for rest, at least three days and nights. By economizing his strength in every way, taking things quietly during the

heat, and putting on speed at night, he thought he should be able to do it. His supplies would last him for that time, if he could only steer a straight course. A memory came to him from a familiar tale. He took a silver dollar from his pocket, and tossed it into the air. He would leave the decision to his gods.

Heads north. Tails south. It was at any rate even chances that he would strike the right course at his first attempt. Heads it was. He rose to his feet cheerfully, and strode off due north, leaving the railway farther behind him at every stride.

CHAPTER III

At the end of that day he was beginning to feel almost sure that he had taken the wrong direction, for he had traveled rapidly and steered a much straighter course than on the preceding night, but it grew dark before he was quite certain. He was afraid of going astray again after nightfall, and, as soon as he lost his bearings, he stopped, took his first rations from the basket, and prepared to sleep. But for a long time, sleep refused to visit him. His allowance of food and water had been too small. When at last he dropped off into a light doze, it was troubled with dreams,—the faces of his old associates, his arrest, and wanderings, endless wanderings, through desert circles that always brought him back to one awful grotesque cactus, with a black hunched shadow squatting at its foot like a mocking

goblin. . . . The faces of the people in the train returned to him . . . the face of the girl at the wayside station, a dry-skinned face, tanned with western sun, and aquiline almost as an Indian's. Foolish and selfish, as all her kind, she would feed her horse with sugar, though cities were wasted with famine. He hated her with that nightmare hatred of the small hours. He was pursued again by someone mounted on a horse, the horse that she had been feeding. . . . The galloping hoof-beats came nearer. They thundered in his ears. He woke, and sat bolt upright. Fifty yards away, a figure mounted on a black horse went sweeping by, like a maned and wind-blown cloud, gigantic against the stars. He leapt to his feet, uncertain whether it was one of his pursuers or not. In a few moments it had disappeared into the night; but, for some time afterwards, he heard the galloping hoof-beats ringing over the firm ground or thudding softly over sand.

When daylight returned, he examined the

ground to discover whether that shadowy rider had passed him only in a dream. But the hoofprints were clear; and, as they led to the northwest, he discarded his former plan and decided to follow them. By midday, he was convinced that they could not have been made by one of his pursuers, for there was no sign of the railway; but the trail struck straight as an arrow on its original course. Baxter felt sure now that he was following some one who knew his way, and that, before long, over the next blue ridge, perhaps, he would come to some ranch on the fringes of civilization.

In his new optimism, he took a little more than his allowance of water and food, and pressed on eagerly; but, as his shadow lengthened eastward, he began to doubt again. The hoofprints became irregular and blurred as though the horse had been dragging as heavily as himself. Once he came on a confusion of marks near a cactus. He examined them closely. The rider had evidently dismounted for a time. The cactus had been cut curiously

as though with a small knife. Several of the fronds were lying on the ground. They appeared to have been cut open. The pulp had been scraped out. Others looked as if the horse had been feeding upon them. . . .

On the farther edge of this trampled patch of ground, Baxter discovered the footprints of the rider, clearly marked. They were the footprints of a woman.

He could think of no explanation, but set himself doggedly once more to follow the trail into those heat-shaken, wine-colored distances. All day, against a pearly horizon, he had watched three mesas like lopped and battered pyramids of shining mauve and shadowy violet receding before him. About an hour before sunset he saw that he was really approaching them; for, though the light was mellowing, they slowly sharpened before him into curiously stratified red sandstone rocks casting unending shadows to the east across a milk-white plain. At their broken bases he lost the trail for a while, and went groping for it

among the tumbled fragments of a petrified forest. He stumbled over massive logs of jasper and agate, broken here and there, like quartz, into surfaces that might be polished by the jeweller to show all the exquisite graining of the original wood translated into lucent reds and yellows, or clouds of mossy green, like living seaweed afloat within the clear stone. He groped among drifted boughs of rough opal, boughs that had borne green leaves and dipped under nesting birds in the mesozoic age. He wandered there, in the midst of that desert immortality, the creature of a day, bathed with the colors of the sunset, groping for the lost trail to his own shadowy world, a world that seemed almost as far away in space now as those old woods in time. . . .

Darkness ended his search. He cut down his allowance of food and water to balance the error of the morning, and passed his second night under the desert stars, amongst that terrible and beautiful company from a vanished age.

Perhaps he slept and dreamed. Perhaps he had grown light-headed from the heat of the day, mental stress, and his physical privations. Certain it is that during the night he wandered through wilder regions than any man ever explored by day. When the light returned and he discovered the trail again, he followed it like a man in a trance, haunted by the things he had seen.

Once, in broad daylight, he could have sworn that he saw a gigantic Sphinx, an Indian Sphinx, with painted face, and the long body of an enormous leopard crouched before him among the sand-hills. He saw the long flanks undulating as she breathed in the palpitating heat. It was not until he was near enough to touch those gigantic paws of volcanic rock so curiously molded and corroded under the red igneous column of the neck that he was able to break the spell with an oath at his own folly.

The sun was high overhead as he went

stumbling down a wide valley, dry and dead as a valley of the moon—for even the cactus refused to grow here—but filled with a heat more ferocious than that of the rocky levels behind it. The blinding sunlight struck up at him from the crumbling bed, where thousands of years ago, perhaps, a river had flowed. Sometimes the ground under his feet was white and powdery as with the dust of bones. Sometimes it was hard as iron. Always, in every direction, it denied escape from the terrible heat. There were moments when, in his desire to escape from it, he felt mad impulses to fling himself down and try and burrow into the earth. He had passed beyond the stage when it was possible to save himself by resting. Any change was for the better; but real change never came. Once, at a little distance, he saw a dark object lying on the ground before him, an object that he felt, with a kind of dazed wonder, had no right to be there. He staggered up to it, and discovered that it was

the dead body of a horse. It seemed to have no significance, although it could not have been dead for many hours. It lay there as if it had been dropped from another planet.

CHAPTER IV

He was unable to think clearly about it, for the heat buffeted him like the gloves of an invisible boxer, and he saw everything through a suffused red glow. He stumbled on blindly. The blood sang in his ears, now with the drone of a mosquito (though even the smallest of winged creatures shunned that barren region), and now with the dreadful mockery of flowing water. Twice he stopped and listened to that phantom river. His senses were beginning to deceive him, or the buttes and cones of rock around him were becoming insubstantial. They assumed fantastic shapes, forming and dissolving, now like clouds, now like phantoms of men and women. He shouted at them, and he did not know whether it was his own voice echoing back, or whether they were talking to him.

Once, in one of his attempts to escape from the furnace of sunlight, he tried to creep under

the projecting ledge of rock that cast a narrow strip of shadow; but even there the earth was as hot as the iron floor of an oven, and it was only his fatigue that prevented him from stumbling to his feet and going on. But it was something to escape the direct rays. He lay there for perhaps an hour, perhaps for two. He had lost all sense of time and felt that he was being absorbed into the timelessness of the unchanging desert itself.

When at last he resumed his journey he was a little weaker than before his rest. He seemed to have the dreadful weights of a nightmare attached to his feet; and at times he felt that it would be easier to crawl on his hands and knees than to walk upright. Then Nature began to drug him with the merciful poisons of his own fatigue. She touched his brain with the deceptive calm and lucidity that come to the sufferer when the morphia begins to work.

He was groping along a narrow gully when he heard a deep booming note echoing from the rocky walls above him. A moment later

he recognized it distinctly as the lowing of oxen from a deep hollow in front. He hurried on to the edge where the ground dropped steeply down to it, and a few hundred yards below him he saw distinctly the glint of a water-pool, a ring of ox-carts, and little groups of men, women, and children, resting beside them. There was nothing vague or visionary in the picture. It was all as sharply defined, in that dry brightness, as if he were looking through reversed field-glasses at objects only a few feet away. The pool, diminished by distance, was bright and sharp as the silver coin that he had tossed to decide his course. The faces were clear cut as cameos; he had a vague sense that they were too real to be true, like figures on a stage, figures of a vanished period. He could see the red and blue shirts of the men, their long boots, the occasional flash of the sun on a pistol or a bowie knife in their belts. He tried to run towards them, but he was at the end of his strength, and he fell on his knees. A mist

came over his eyes, and he heard the shrill cry of a woman,—"Will Manly! Thank God, there's Will Manly!"

The people in the corral had seen him. He heard the patter of their feet approaching, though he himself could see no more and had fallen forward in semi-consciousness. He heard them gathering round him with the rustle of a flock of sheep.

"It's not Will Manly," he heard a voice say. Then hands raised him to his feet again. Arms supported him, and he was led, tottering, down the slope to the water-pool. Some one put a cup of brackish water to his heat-cracked lips, but it abated his thirst as little as a raindrop could irrigate the desert. For a moment only it gave him back his speech.

"More!" he croaked, like a raven. But, for the present, wisely perhaps, more was withheld.

He was conscious of being led gently to a resting place, sheltered from the sun, by one

of the wagons, he thought. Then he lost consciousness altogether.

It was dark when he awoke from that death-like swoon. The stars glittered overhead, hard and brilliant as diamonds, and their spears of light were as intolerable to the wounded nerves of his eyes as the rays of the sun. His rescuers were seated in little groups around the corral. The largest of these groups was only a few feet away, and he heard them talking, in tones that seemed oddly familiar, like the language of old ballads.

"He looks as if he has come a long way," said a man in a red shirt, who appeared to be the leader of the party. "If he can guide us to any ranch within fifty miles, I think the cattle can do it. Oherwise, we must wait till Rogers and Manly come back with help."

"Twenty days and nights we've waited already, Asabel Bennett," said a tall dark woman, rocking a child in her arms. "Rogers and Manly are desert dust by now. If this man knows of any ranch within five hundred

miles, and can set us on our way, in God's name, hitch the oxen up, and let us go! We can leave a message here for Rogers and Manly, if they should ever return. Give the children a chance. Every day that we wait here the chance grows smaller. We must kill another of the oxen soon for food; and what shall we do when we've killed them all? It would be better to be killing them on our way across the desert."

"No! No!" cried the two older women together. "Don't leave the water! Bide by the water!"

"You're right," quavered an old man, supporting them. "It's the first water we've seen in all this hell, and we shall never find any more."

"We can fill our bottles, and let the cattle drink the rest before we go," said the first woman scornfully.

"Ah, yes, but the water-bottles will give out again. Bide by the water-springs you know, that's my motto," said the old man.

"If it runs out again," said the dark woman, "we can kill one of the oxen, and you can lap its blood. Look, the stranger is awake. Question him, Asabel. Here, give him water. It will help him to speak."

Baxter saw her shadowy figure stooping between him and the stars. She knelt at his side, offering him a cup of water. He sat up and took it with trembling fingers, emptied it at a draught, and leaned back against the wheel of the wagon.

"We want you to help us," said the dark woman, while the other groups crept closer, and seated themselves in a half-circle around them, as if to hear an eastern tale. "Did you come here from a ranch?" the woman continued.

Baxter shook his head. He tried to tell them, though his tongue stumbled over the words, that there had been a freight-wreck, he had wandered too far from the train and had lost his way.

They did not seem to understand.

"Train? Train?" said Asabel Bennett. There was a mutter from the listening circle. "He means caravan."

"Were you with a caravan?" said Bennett.

Baxter shook his head again.

"No," he said. "It was a train. The freight-train ahead of us went off the line." He began to speak rapidly, giving them further details.

"I do not understand this man's tale," said Asabel Bennett at last, turning to the others. "Either his mind is wandering, or he comes from a place where they speak a different language from ours."

The dark woman was peering curiously at Baxter's clothes. She fingered his sleeve.

"Where is your home?" she said.

"Los Angeles."

"Life must be difficult in those lonely places," she murmured. "There are not many settlers there, I suppose?"

Haltingly, as a man describes the home that he never expects to see again, Baxter began

to talk of his city, with its five hundred thousand inhabitants. He murmured of lighted streets, and the sunset road through gardens and orchards to Santa Monica and the sea. His listeners must be distraught by their sufferings, he thought, for they did not seem to understand one-half of what he said or to believe the other half. They looked at him with pity in their eyes. He tried to speak very lucidly and simply as if he were telling tales to very small children, and, seeing that they failed to grasp one of his very simplest statements about motor-cars, he fumbled in the basket beside him for the Los Angeles Sunday newspaper, which contained, amongst other things, an elaborate picture section. He did not know that the news section contained an account of the crime for which he was wanted by the police.

"Bring the light!" cried Asabel Bennett.

A small boy dived under the shadows of the wagon, and came running back with a lighted lantern. It was placed on the ground in the

midst of the circle. Asabel Bennett spread the paper out before it, and began to read, with the others peering over his shoulders. Baxter still sat leaning back against the wagon, and watching the ring of absorbed faces against the background of the unchanging desert cliffs, and the high, unchanging stars. The faces looked bewildered.

CHAPTER V

"This is a very strange fairy-tale," said Asabel Bennett at last. "We have all of us had our visions of the Golden West. It is a good tale—so far as I understand it—but it tells only of what things will be like many years from now. There is the date at the head of the paper, August 30, 19—. By that time, Los Angeles may have earned its name and become a kind of paradise; but it is small comfort for us poor pioneers of 1849."

"But it's true! I swear it's true!" cried Baxter vehemently, drawing all those hungering eyes back to his face. He felt vaguely that unless he could establish the reality of his world he would be submerged in this desert timelessness, and doomed to grope eternally through its unchanging circles. He felt like a man in the delirium of a fever, fighting to retain one distant glimpse of the old sane existence, fighting to get back of it.

"See here!" he cried, fumbling in his pocket again. "Here's the coin I tossed up when I was wondering which way to choose. Look at the date on it!" and he tossed the bright dollar to the group about the lantern. His eyes were still affected, he supposed, by that last blinding day of his journey, for the coin seemed to skim right through that dark group of men and women, as a moonbeam slips through dark water. Yet some one caught and held it; and there were muttered exclamations as it passed from hand to hand, irradiating their hollow palms when they turned it to the light.

"There is no time in the desert," said the tall woman who had given him the water. Her lean dark face had the look of an Indian Sphinx against the stars. "Perhaps he speaks the truth."

The old man who wished to stay by the water-pool was still poring over a section of the paper. His eyes became suspicious. He looked up quickly.

"What is your name, stranger?" he asked.

"James L. Baxter."

"Listen to this, friends," the old man cried shrilly. "This is how men love their paradise, when God has given them the free run of it." He read slowly and painfully, following the lines with one finger, like a schoolboy:—

DYNAMITE PLOT DISCOVERED

The authorities have obtained evidence recently of a wide-spread plot to extend the theories of Lenin to this country. The extremist leaders of the I. W. W. have for some time been advocating the overthrow of all existing forms of Government by violence and bloodshed; and the first step to this end was to be taken during a deliberately provoked general strike within the next few weeks. The police are now actively searching for the leaders of the revolutionaries, amongst whom James L. Baxter, a native of Los Angeles, is the most violent in his aims. It is reported that he is responsible for a bomb-throwing plot aimed at some of the leading citizens of the State. Among those marked for assassination, at the time of the general strike, was Senator John Reddington.

A momentary ripple of mocking laughter broke from the lips of the listeners.

"Did you want to destroy the paradise of which you have been telling us?" said the dark woman.

Baxter tried to explain, pouring out words almost as eloquently as if he had been at a meeting of the Reds, but, at the end of every sentence he heard that low melancholy laughter, withering his old insanities, till it seemed unbelievable that they had ever bloomed.

"We are the pioneers—in the desert," said Asabel Bennett at last, and his voice was as dry as the whisper of a dead cactus frond in a desert wind. "We should like to know the truth about our promised land. You say that there is no man so poor that he cannot ride from end to end of your state in these magical carriages that move without horses? You say that many of your laborers possess these carriages. There are pictures of them in this paper, driving their wives and children through boundless orchards. But in the world that we know, even the fabulously rich, even the greatest emperors of Europe could not do these

things; and any one who promised them these miracles would be thought mad. Surely your poor men are very rich in some things. But I understand they complain. What is their grievance?"

"Ah, you don't understand," said Baxter, lamely trying to explain—or so it seemed both to his hearers and himself—that the cars of the rich were better upholstered than those of the poor.

The shadowy circle of the pioneers looked at him pityingly.

"So it is not because you are poorer than even the richest we ever knew," said Asabel Bennett, "but because others are richer than yourselves, that you wish to destroy?" Again the low withering laugh went whispering round. "These newspapers," he continued, "where every morning you find all that has been happening in the remotest corners of the world flashed to you by lightning, so that you sit like gods contemplating the whole planet,—the wealthiest princes of our world would give

half their possessions to see a miracle like that! But you tell me, that for a few cents these things are open to all, and that all the wonders of the world are passed every night before the eyes of the down-trodden in—how do you call them?—your Picture Palaces? You tell me that armies march before your proletariat there as they have never marched before kings, and that navies dip their flags and salute you nightly in those halls. These things do not appear marvelous to you. They have been staled to you by custom. But how would you like to show those wonders to your children, Janet Rogers? And what is your grievance here, James Baxter?"

Once again the revolutionary leader tried to mutter something, but it sounded as foolish to himself as it did to his hearers. They understood him to say that everybody could not sit in the best seats, and that some things cost more than others.

"So again, although every one of you is richer in these things than any emperor that

we knew," said Asabel Bennett, "it is only because a few others have more than yourselves that you wish to destroy that happy state?"

And again the low mocking laughter went round; but, this time, James Baxter himself helped to swell that strange ironic chorus.

"And these hospitals," Asabel Bennett continued, "where miracles of surgery are performed every day, and where tens of thousands of your 'proletariat' are saved by doctors (members, I understand, of what you call the 'bourgeoisie'). Man, do you know that Crœsus himself could not command that healing skill in our world!"

"Ah, but there are some in my world to-day who can command more," answered Baxter. "They are rich enough to be nursed privately."

They all laughed together again.

"So, finally, it is not because you are poor," said Asabel Bennett, "but because others have more than yourself, that you wished to destroy your world, and came into this hell? Man, man, that is not love of your kind! That is

the black envy of a shrunken brain and a shriveled heart! It is not the democratic passion of which your revolutionaries rave; it is a blind hatred of the good that all can share; and a desire (as you must know if you honestly search your own mind) for something more to accrue to yourself alone. It is *because* all can share your good that you despise it.

"We are the pioneers, and we shall never live to see the miracles of which you have told us. We shall never reach your City of the Angels. But we can plainly see that the least of your world is richer than the greatest in ours. You are revolting against Nature herself, if you revolt at every inequality. You will never make men all of one height or equal strength. The rain will fall in one place and avoid another till the end of time. The mountainous inequalities that seem so great to you when you stand at their base and fix your eyes upon them are so small in relation to the whole field of the world that, if you leveled them out over it, you would not add the thousandth part

of a grain to any man's portion. Is it worth while to halt that march of the whole race and destroy the State that has already achieved so much, in order that you may fight the indomitable variety of Nature and persuade the clouds that they must rain equally over every spot on earth?

"Even between ourselves there is one inequality that you can never adjust. We are the pioneers, talking to you here in the timeless and unchanging desert, where thousands have laid them down to die on their way to your paradise. How are you going to repay them? You talk of your rights. Have you no debts? Do you owe nothing to the bleached bones in this Valley of Death, that you feel so free to throw over all duties for random robbery and murder?"

The man in the red shirt spoke with the glow of an ancient prophet. Baxter struggled to his feet with his hands to his throat as if he were choking.

"Say no more," he cried. "The desert itself

—this blind brutal desert—has been enough to show me that I am up against something more than man. Something that wipes out cities with lava, and wrecks ships at sea, and kills men of hunger and thirst; or when it can't do that, robs them slowly of their powers and makes them grow old and brings their dust back to the dust. I know now that I have been attributing those universal injustices to my neighbor. I know now, that when men are lost in the desert they have no time to fight. It is only when they have conquered it, and become a little prosperous, perhaps a little too prosperous, that they begin to kill one another. Then the desert comes in again, and wins. I didn't know my enemy."

"Come and see one that you mistook for an enemy," said Asabel Bennett, picking up the lantern.

The tall woman and the red-shirted pioneer took each an arm of the limp figure in the white drill suit, raised him to his feet and led him tottering across the corral.

A woman rose from the shadow of a wagon on the further side.

"Tread softly. She's sleeping," she whispered, pointing to a dark recumbent figure at her feet.

Asabel Bennett swung his lantern forward a little, so that its faint light fell for a moment on the sleeper's face. It was the face of the young woman that Baxter had seen at the wayside station, feeding her horse with sugar; but, in sleep, it was the face of a tired child.

CHAPTER VI

"Come back, and I will tell you about it," whispered Asabel Bennett, and his voice was low and musical as the whisper of the trade wind among the palm trees of Monterey.

Baxter followed him to the other side of the corral.

"We found her last night at the mouth of the valley," Asabel Bennett continued, "lying on the ground where her horse had fallen and died. We carried her down here, and brought her back to life. She told us her tale, as you have told us yours. Her name is Jean Reddington, the daughter of the Reddington you were going to kill."

"I didn't know my enemy," Baxter muttered again.

"Perhaps," said Asabel Bennett, "you neither of you knew your friends. When you were pursued, she refused to let any one ride

her favorite Nita but herself. She was not thinking of you. She was not even thinking of helping the officers of the law. She was thinking only of Nita. So she rode after you, with a man on each side holding onto the saddle. They couldn't keep up. When they let go, one of them fell, and his shout frightened the mare. She bolted, and the darkness came. Since then, Jean Reddington has been leading you deeper and deeper into the desert, as carelessly as she once pursued you. Her only food has been a few bits of the sugar that she had put in her pocket some days ago for Nita, and she would have died of thirst if she had not known how to find the sap of the cactus. She is helpless now, so there is at least the bond of your peril between you. If ever you overcome it, try to remember what you learned here. We are all of us pioneers. Each of us has to conquer a desert and pass through this valley of decision. You must leave us now, and try to return to your own generation. If you succeed, remember that we have only sent you ahead of us, as

we sent Manly and Rogers ahead, believing that they would be loyal to us, the pioneers."

Again the strange sensation of having passed through this place before in some previous existence possessed the mind of Baxter as he stared at the shadowy figures round him. They seemed to be growing more shadowy.

"Tell me the name of the valley!" he cried.

"Death Valley," came the answer, quite clearly, though he did not know whether it was the voice of that vanishing throng, or only a light stirring of the desert air. On that instant, the shadowy folk with whom he had been speaking seemed to melt into the purple shadows of the cliff. Pioneers, wagons, and cattle melted away as though they had never been. He moved forward, stretching out his hands as if to try and grasp some substantial thing in the vacant air, moved forward to where they had shown him the daughter of his enemy, stretched on the earth in a profound sleep. He stole quietly to her side and looked at her face again, the face of a tired child.

He stood there for two or three minutes, wondering at the hostility that the mere mention of her name would once have aroused in him. Gradually, his own world and all that had happened since his escape came back to him. Then he moved a few paces off and sat down to wait for the dawn and the waking of the sleeper.

He puzzled over all that had happened to him during that night. He had been moving in a mirage of the desert, a mirage that had played tricks with time as well as with space; but he knew that the shadows he had seen had been cast by realities.

He could see no water-pool now. There was no sign of water in that deadly region, and he wondered where the cup had been filled that the shadows had placed to his lips. A little distance away he saw his precious basket and went to examine its contents again, fearing that during his mental wanderings they might have been lost. The remains of his food supply were still safe. One of the water-bottles was

still unopened, but the other was empty. Perhaps it was his own hand that, during his delirium, had put the cup to his lips. The pioneers had told him that Jean Reddington also had drunk of that cup. He wondered if it were possible. . . .

The sleeper woke before dawn. The recumbent figure stirred slightly, and Baxter heard a faint cry.

He answered it at once. "It's all right. Don't be afraid." And the next moment he was standing face to face with the daughter of the man he had been planning to kill.

Baxter saw by the expression of her face that she knew him as the fugitive whom she had followed into the desert, nearly sixty hours ago; but she showed no fear. No explanations were necessary. It was exactly as if they were both fully acquainted with what each had heard from the vanished shadows of the pioneers.

There was only one difference in their experience of those shadows, and Baxter saw it at once in the strained lines of her face.

Neither her own hands nor those of the pioneers had been able to lift any cup to her lips during the night. Her eyes met his own piteously.

"Water," she whispered.

Without a word Baxter drew the carefully guarded water-bottle from the basket, opened it, and held it with his own hands to her lips. He let her drink as much as he had been intending to make his own daily allowance, then he withdrew it, saying, "This is all that we have to see us through the rest of the journey."

"How far have we to go?" she said.

"It may be three or four days before we come to water."

"And this is all we have between us?"

Baxter looked at her for a moment. Then he pointed to the neck of the empty bottle protruding from the basket.

"I have another there for myself," he said.

"And you are ready to give me half your chance of getting out of this?"

"Don't be afraid," he replied. "You're go-

ing to come safely through this trouble, and, if you feel up to it, we'd better make a start at once, before the sun begins to make things worse."

She stood still for a moment, looking at him. He almost wondered for a moment whether the daughter of Senator Reddington was going to repudiate his help.

"You don't doubt me?"

"No," she said. "I was only thinking that the pioneers were right. I didn't know my enemy."

And so, down the dark valley, while the stars paled and the highest rocks of the mesas began to smoulder like awful jewels with the approaching dawn, those two strange companions, the stronger aiding the weaker over the broken ground, moved slowly together.

CHAPTER VII

Jean Reddington was so enfeebled by privation that Baxter soon began to realize the hopelessness of the attempt to take her with him. The only chance would be for him to go ahead as rapidly as possible, find help, and return. He remembered roughly the geographical situation of Death Valley; and he knew that, if they followed it, although it was probably not the shortest route, it would lead them in the direction of civilization. But though the settled country must be nearer than in 1849, he could see not the remotest chance of ever reaching it at this pace, and it would only be by a miracle that he could reach it alone. As the day set the desert ablaze with crimson and amethyst and orange, turning all those endless rock-strewn miles of drought to a gorgeous furnace, an inferno of flaming colors, the spirit that had once moved into fanatical rebellion against the

State, flamed up in a new rebellion now against a vaster enemy. Every thought of his mind was concentrated on the new purpose of saving his companion; and though his reason could see no way of doing it, whenever Jean Reddington looked at his face and tried to read their chances there it seemed to shine with hope and courage.

By noon it was quite clear that his companion could go very little farther. Hardly a word passed between them as they walked. Once, as they came to a particularly bad piece of broken ground, she stumbled, and when he helped her to her feet, the white despair of her face forced him to a decision. Fifty yards ahead of them there was a gash at the foot of the cliff, which looked as if it would afford a shelter from the sun.

"You'll have to get out of this furnace," he said; and though, a moment earlier, he had felt as if he himself were about to drop with fatigue, he picked her up as if she had been a child and carried her to that deep recess of

shadow. It proved to be a small cave nearly twelve feet deep.

He sat down beside her while she rested. It was quite clear to him now that the only hope of saving his companion was to make the last desperate effort to save himself without delay; but he was thinking out the most difficult problem that any man could confront. For a time, he shrank from the idea of abandoning her in that wilderness. The chances of his success were so remote, and he could not bear the thought of her dying there alone. There was a still more difficult point to decide. If he left her all the water that remained, it reduced his own chances of bringing back help, and yet he could not bring himself to the point of deciding that he must take his share. He tried to work it out just as if it were a mathematical problem to find the proportions that would give her the best chance of being saved. He was horribly afraid of deceiving himself into taking some minute personal advantage; so afraid that, when he made his decision, he

falsified his mathematics a little in order to make quite certain. He deliberately omitted the factors of the exertions that would be necessary on his part, and the comparative shelter from the heat that would be hers.

"There is only one thing to do," he said at last. "You will have to wait here until I can come back with help."

She looked at him with eyes too tired for fear, and the hopelessness of the look wrung his heart.

"I shall leave you half the water in this bottle," he continued, "and that will last you for two days if you are careful."

He saw a dreadful momentary suspicion come into her face, and added, "I am afraid I told you a lie about the other bottle." He drew it out and showed it to her. "I thought I might be able to help you along a little faster; but there is only one way, and I doubt whether I could get to the end of the journey without taking some of yours. But don't be afraid. I shall come back."

Very carefully, safeguarding every drop, he poured a little less than half of the water into his empty bottle.

"If you wait here," he said, "you will get a little shelter from the heat, and I should advise you to save yourself in every way. Don't move about. Try to sleep if you possibly can, and don't forget that you are going to come through this all right."

He put a few of the crackers in his coat pocket, placed the basket at her side, and left her without looking back. He was already fifty yards on his way when he heard his name called and turned to see her standing at the mouth of the cave. She signed to him to come back, and he obeyed.

"You have forgotten something," she said. "You couldn't possibly do it without more food. I shall only stay here on condition that you take this. I have taken out all that I shall need."

She held out the basket. He saw at once that she had not taken anything.

"You have given me more than you think," he said, almost sullenly. "I shall not take any more; and, unless you promise to stay here, I shall not take anything at all. Remember, that if you don't, you may be responsible for the loss of those who come to look for you."

Without a word more he turned and left her; and in a few minutes Jean Reddington saw him, a white speck dwindling into the tawny distances of the desert valley.

CHAPTER VIII

About nine hours later, bent nearly double with fatigue, he was still moving forward through a deep rock-strewn gully, dry as bone dust and without a hint even of the returning green of the cactus, when he saw before him against the stars, the vast shadowy dome of the Sugar Loaf Peak, which, as he knew, marked the southern limit of the valley. As soon as he saw it, he made his final gambler's decision, drank the small reserve of water, less than a cupful, that he had intended to keep for another twelve hours, rested for five minutes, and then, finding it easier than to rise to his feet, crept forward slowly on hands and knees. As he neared the base of that Dark Tower, he thought that once again the shadows must be talking to him. He heard them calling to each other and hallooing among the rocks.

Then, with a shock of the nerves that seemed to brace him, and to unlock some deep reserves of strength, he saw a ring of stealthy four-footed shadows creeping towards him. Little sparks of red and green—eyes perhaps—glittered, vanished, and glittered again around him like fireflies. They grew bolder. He caught sight of grinning teeth and a red tongue. He thought, with a burst of hope, that they must be coyotes. If they were, he could not be so far from help. There was no food even for the coyotes in the Death Valley. The thought seemed to endow him for the moment with superhuman strength. He would have welcomed a hundred packs of coyotes, and his first impulse was to leap at them, try to seize one of them by the throat, and satisfy his own wolfish hunger and thirst with it. They were too quick for him to reach them with his hands, or he would have attempted it. He stumbled forward, picking up stones as he went, and hurling them at the vague shapes in the darkness. They slunk back, snarling like a pack of

dogs before a specter. . . . Then, abruptly, he found himself face to face with a glimmering figure, seen vaguely like his own image in a shadowy mirror, and for the second time on that desert pilgrimage, he fell forward, face downwards in the dust, while shadows and voices gathered around him. They were more visionary even than the shadows of the pioneers. Their outlines and faces were blurred, and their voices only a murmur; but their very strangeness in this desert proved their reality, and he knew that he was amongst beings of flesh and blood.

They revived him quickly. Water and brandy gave him strength to speak, and he poured out directions as the horses were got ready.

"It can't be more than twenty miles, on the right side of the valley," he repeated, adding anxious little suggestions. "Call to her as you go; she may be asleep. You might miss her; it's a cave in the cliff."

He wanted to go with them, though he knew

that he was at the end of his tether. While he was insisting, and trying to lay hold on the reins with his numbed hands, he reeled again, and dropped. But, before he lost consciousness, he heard the thudding of the horses' hoofs as the search-party went up Death Valley.

The helping hands and voices around him did everything that could be done. Half an hour later, he lay, pillowed comfortably in a wagon, looking up at the starry sky and wondering at the miracle that had happened. Perhaps half a dozen times in a year well-equipped adventurous parties of young Californians would make an expedition to Death Valley, along the route of Rogers and Manly, and it was one of these rare expeditions that he had encountered.

They had told him to sleep, but he could not sleep until the search party returned. He had little doubt now that all would be well, but there was something better than sleep in the orderly movement of those shining hosts above him, by which he marked the lapse of the hours.

There was Orion, on his long bright trail to the west; Orion, the hunter, slain by Artemis because he loved the Dawn. . . .

"All safe!" he heard voices calling. A clatter of hoofs echoed among the rocks. The distance could not have been as great as he thought. He raised himself on an elbow and saw one of the rescuers lifting Jean Reddington down from the saddle. Then he turned over and slept.

CHAPTER IX

The journey from the desert through its gray-green fringes of sage-brush to the palm-trees and blossoming orchards of the sunset-land has always a suggestion of beautiful compensations, as if dews had been denied to the wilderness only to enrich the paradise beyond. The travelers from Death Valley passed slowly through those exquisite gradations between the golden drought and the sun-kissed valleys where the warm mist floated at evening over fragrant orange-orchards. Days and nights had drifted by, but to Baxter the whole journey was one deepening and miraculous hour, confirming in some subtle way everything that the pioneers had told him in the desert about the heaven that he had wished to destroy.

Perhaps he was unable to discern how much of this new glory came from within, as he

glanced at the face of Jean Reddington, riding beside him towards the sunset. Very few words had passed between them on the journey. It was not until they were entering Hesperia, that little shining town of palm-trees among the foot-hills of the Sierra Nevada, that she spoke to him of her rescue. The beauty of the land was opening out before them. The little white bungalows, clouded round the eaves with purple bougainvillea, glimmered like Greek temples through the dusk; and the street lights among the long green tresses of the pepper trees hung like clusters of shining fruit.

"I have never thanked you," she said, as they dropped a little behind the rest of the party, "for bringing me back to all this. It's like Heaven opening out, isn't it?"

"And the arms of God's mercy," murmured Baxter.

She looked at him with shining eyes. "I suppose you are going into danger at this moment?" she said. "Have you any plans?"

"I am going to keep my promise to the pioneers," said Baxter.

"My father would help you if . . ."

"No," he interrupted at once. "I must stand on my own feet. Besides, I've got to try and persuade my old friends that they're on the wrong road. There's a meeting in Los Angeles to-morrow night, and I must be there, or I may be too late to prevent worse things happening. They would never listen to me again, if your father were even to shake hands with me. You see——" he smiled a little grimly—"I'm between two fires. I can't go with you much farther, or I may be taken by your own friends. I understand that the plan is to put up at the Juniper Inn here to-night. I shall slip away as soon as we reach it."

"But how will you get to Los Angeles?"

"Even in Hesperia there are a few followers of the red flag. One of my friends here will lend me a coat to cover my tatters, and drive me in by automobile."

"You will let me know how you get on?"

He looked at her for a moment without speaking, and his face had all the drought of Death Valley in it.

"I don't suppose we shall meet again," he said. "I am a pioneer now, in the desert."

"But you have conquered it once?" she replied.

Nothing more passed between them till the glimmering figures a hundred yards ahead pulled up at the entrance to the Inn. Baxter and Jean Reddington also stopped, and dismounted in the shadow of a lion-maned palm. He held out his hand.

"I must say good-by to you here," he said. And, as she laid her hand in his own, her face looked as he had seen it once before, when he left her in the desert.

"Perhaps," she said at last, as he relinquished her hand, "we are all of us pioneers. I shall do my best."

It was dark in the shadow of the palm; but he saw that the tears were running down her face; and, for a moment, his control failed.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" he cried. "There are so many deserts between us. Good-by!"

For a moment her tears were salt against his lips. Then they parted, blindly. Baxter hurried down a by-street under the deep black shadows of the eucalyptus trees. Jean Reddington, with bent head, led the two horses up to the Inn.

CHAPTER X

When Baxter arrived at the secret meeting of the Reds in Los Angeles, he knew the risk that he was about to run. The forces of the law were already against him; before long, he would probably be an Ishmaelite among the forces of rebellion. It was more than possible that they would attack him, perhaps kill him, as a traitor; but his resolution had been steadily strengthened as the wonder of the civilized world opened out before him once again.

When the motor-car bore him through the brilliant streets of Los Angeles, it was as if he saw a city of men for the first time. Despite all the apparent wrongs that were inherent in the material universe, all the changes and chances that fell upon the just and unjust in human affairs as in Nature herself, he saw that this thing created by the spirit of man and continually arising to new heights was good.

But there was an unwonted ferment in the city to-night. Little groups of excited men at street corners were discussing (as Baxter knew) the impending strike, which was to initiate the revolution. The newspapers carried big headlines warning the public that all light and power might be cut off from the city at any moment. It was a dramatic coincidence that, while the car was still only half way through the city, the appointed moment should come to confirm Baxter's new apprehension of the truth. All the constellated glory of those lights, the stars of civilization that he had fought through Death Valley to reach, were suddenly turned off, as if by a gigantic hand at some central station, and the whole city was plunged into darkness. The battle had begun already.

The meeting of the Reds was held in one of the worst districts, at a dilapidated hotel, run by a Mexican half-breed, who had become uncommonly prosperous of late, since the trickle of Red gold had begun to flow through Vladi-

vostok. This man and three of the Red leaders greeted Baxter with enthusiasm in a stuffy little room behind the main "lecture-hall" where the others were waiting. One of the leaders, known among his associates as the Panther, overwhelmed him with congratulations on his escape, and boasted volubly of the complete triumph of the "proletariat" that was even now beginning. Then they led him through a door that opened directly on to the platform in the larger room. He could see nothing of the men assembled there, for, since the proletariat had extinguished its own lights, the room was in almost complete darkness. But Baxter knew, from former experience, that it was a long low hall which would seat some hundreds. A single oil lamp on the platform showed only the faces of the four men beside him. The Chairman, a Russian Jew with fanatical eyes and a mass of black hair that looked as if it were brushed back over a frame, opened the proceedings.

"Comrades," he said, "the victory of the

proletariat is beginning. Let us sing the Internationale, but quietly. We do not wish a police raid to-night."

Somewhere in the darkness a group of voices began to sing in low tones. The song was taken up, section by section, till the whole hall vibrated like the engine-room of a steamer. There were certainly hundreds of men present. The Panther wandered up and down at the back of the platform, with his long fingers twitching. He examined the shuttered windows at each end, exactly as his namesake examines the doors of its cage.

"Comrades," the Chairman resumed at the end of the song, "the first speaker to-night will be Comrade Baxter."

A low thunder of applause, a thudding of feet on the wooden floor all over the building, was succeeded by a hush and an audible intake of the breath as Baxter threw off his light coat and stood before them in his tattered, blood-stained clothes.

"Comrades," he began, "I have brought you a message from the desert."

Tersely, vividly, he told them of his escape from his warders, of his journey through Death Valley, and his meeting with the pioneers. "Those were the true Reds," he cried, "those men in red shirts, Asabel Bennett and the rest of them. They told me, they taught me, that you and I were making a mistake; and I have come to give you their message. I am sorry that I cannot see your faces. All this putting out of lights, we are told, is only a means to an end. But the lights have never come on again in Russia. Let us make sure that the end is not going to be total darkness here too."

Baxter had always been a good speaker; but to-night as he warmed to his work, he spoke like a man possessed with a spirit greater than his own. He spoke as if he had become a mere mask, a mouthpiece of the vanished pioneers who had built up a nation with their hands. He pleaded with the hidden crowd in the rough

direct vernacular that they could understand, pleaded with them for the fabric that they were ready to destroy. Mutterings reached him from the darkness, and he saw, with a sidelong glance, that the Panther, after some whispers with the Jew, was leaving the platform. It was a danger sign, he knew. The leaders would stick at nothing, and he guessed the nature of the consultation that was being held in the little room at his back. But he was gripping the crowd in front, and he knew it, even in that darkness.

Lucidly, point by point, he delivered the message of the pioneers, and passed before his hearers the pageant of their great inheritance. He demolished the cheap rhetoric with which it had been assailed, and his weapon was irony, a brutal sardonic mockery, couched in unprintable language that went punching home again and again like the ungloved knuckles of a boxer. He admitted all the wrongs of our civilization, as he admitted the horrors of earthquake, pestilence, and famine in Nature. He

not only admitted them, he painted them in raw colors and naked phrases that showed them to his hearers for the first time. "But are you going to abolish houses," he cried, "because your children have been burned alive in them?"

The gist of his argument, in printable language, was that they did not know their enemy. The apparent indifference of the great body of civilization to its own people had sometimes an appearance of wicked cruelty; but this indifference was the same in kind as that of the Reds themselves or any other group of men to whom a wholesale massacre in China means less than a knife-thrust in their own immediate circle.

"This very night," he said, "men were on the operating tables in the hospitals. Did you think of them when you put the lights out and left the surgeons groping in the dark to stop them bleeding to death?"

He told them that they were bound together much more closely than they knew. He showed them that men must pay the penalties for their

own mistakes, and that as a rule they must even abide by their bad luck. He gave them analogies from their card games. "What would become of the game," he cried, "if every one insisted on winning?" Let them organize for creation, for making the game of life more worth while, not for destruction and general chaos. It was in the laws of the game that they would find their freedom; and the development of the game depended on their development of its laws, not in a return to lawlessness. If it was greater wealth they wanted, they would never obtain it by destroying the existing wealth of a few, or by sharing it out, one dollar to each of the proletariat, and a sackful to the Panther. They must level up, not down. All this talk of "my neighbor's money or my neighbor's life" in the interests of human brotherhood, was the drivel of political crooks. If all men were kings, let the kings be a little prouder. Let them stand on their own feet, and win by their own muscle and brain. On the lowest ground they would ob-

tain more than ever they would by picking their neighbor's pocket, or by setting the feet above the head, and destroying all natural values.

"It is not a bad desert that we are fighting through," he said, in conclusion. "The pioneers in Death Valley told me it was a better paradise than any of their kings had ever known. If it is not good enough for you and me, we must organize to make things better without troubling our heads about robbing and killing the few lucky ones who don't agree with us; and we can't even see the next step on our road until you put the lights on."

He had carried the greater number of the hidden crowd with him, and he knew it even before the unexpected burst of applause that told him so. Unfortunately, the crowd was not the leader of the crowd. The applause was so evidently real that it put Baxter off his guard. He turned; and, seeing that he was alone on the platform, he walked without hesitation through the door at the back to look for

the others. He expected at least a hot argument with the three leaders, but they stood facing him there in the stuffy little room, looking strangely complacent, as if they had come to some satisfactory conclusion. The Panther even sniggered a little. Not a word was spoken. The Mexican shut the door behind Baxter. There was hardly a second between the click of the latch and the savage grunt of the half-breed as he drove his knife into Baxter's left side.

CHAPTER XI

The house of John Reddington, on the heights overlooking Los Angeles, had been plunged into darkness like the rest of the city. On the following evening, when Jean Reddington looked from the veranda for the usual constellated streets and starry towers that shine so brightly through the Californian air, she saw only a vast obscurity, illuminated here and there by the red and white fireflies of motor-lamps flickering through the long avenues of trees.

Down there, she knew that an outlawed man —her rescuer—had been fighting with that darkness. It seemed to her like a tangible and gigantic enemy, a symbol of the evil forces that were trying to reduce the world to a desert again.

A motor-car came slowly round the curved

road to the house, and stopped in front of the door. A young man alighted, and came up to the veranda, raising his hat.

"Miss Reddington?" he said.

"Yes."

"One of my patients at the hospital asked me to bring you this note. It was that I. W. W. blackguard, who was responsible, I believe, for all your troubles in the desert. He showed me the note, and I couldn't make out why he should want to bother you with it; but the poor devil was dying, so I told him I would. He died just before I left. They had a big row at one of their meetings last night. I am told that he routed the extremists and that the strike will probably end at once. The meeting ended in a free fight, apparently, and somebody knifed him. They just missed his heart. He managed to lay out two of the leaders, and then staggered into the street. We did everything we could for him at the hospital, chiefly because he killed the other two chaps, but he died about an hour ago."

Jean Reddington leaned over the parapet of the veranda, and took the note.

"Thank you," she said. "Ah, there's my father. I know he'd like to speak to you about it."

The doctor smiled, raised his hat again, and walked towards the burly figure that had just emerged from the house.

Jean Reddington turned in the opposite direction to a side door, and ran up to her room. There she lighted a candle by the side of her bed, and opened the note with shaking fingers. It contained only a few scrawled words in pencil, but her body shook with all that she discerned in them, as though his arms were about her and his lips upon her lips. There was no meaning for the others in those words. He had chosen them carefully for herself, and suppressed everything else.

"All's well. I have come through Death Valley, and it's opening out again. There was a palm in Hesperia.

"James Baxter."

She extinguished the candle, moved to the window, and looked again towards the darkened city. Far away to the southward, a crown of little lights glittered, as if a cluster of stars had dropped to earth.

"A very unstable character," she heard her father say, on the veranda below.

"Well, he certainly helped to break the strike," said the doctor. "I wish they would all save us the trouble of killing them. Look, there are the lights coming on again. Beautiful, aren't they?"

The watcher above sank on her knees by the window. Mile after mile, as if the lonely hand of the dead man were turning them on from an invisible center, innumerable points of light awoke in the purple valley. She seemed to be looking down over the edge of the world into another night of stars, and another milky way.

Nearer and nearer came those glittering constellations. The clustering globes shone out like bunches of white grapes through the amethystine dusk of the arroyo, and along the

dark avenue of palms that climbed to the white-pillared house.

"It was a curious little note, but I promised to bring it," said the voice of the doctor immediately under her window.

"Poor devil. I suppose he had the desert on his mind," said her father, as he switched on the light in the porch.

It seemed as if all the lights in the world were on now, with the exception of one. Jean Reddington preferred to remain kneeling in the dark at her window, repeating over and over again the words that they were not meant to understand:—

"All's well. I have come through Death Valley. . . ."

[illegible] N. JACKSON STREET
JACKSON MICHIGAN

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